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The Only One in the World February 4



Raymond Weir

Raymond Weir was the first African American polygraph examiner hired by the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA), NSA's predecessor organization. In fact, when he was hired in 1951,* as he later recalled, he believed he was "the first Black polygraph examiner in the world."

Use of the polygraph in the central cryptologic organization began in May 1951 due to the upsurge in hiring after the Korean War (which began in June 1950). In mid-1951, the organization responsible for the polygraph program at AFSA(AFSA-164) listed 11 operators on duty.

In a memo dated August 23, 1961, program chief L. W. Gillespie noted that they had only one female polygraph operator, Edmee A. Boulanger. Gillespie explained that "certain percentages of women subjects desire tests by [a] member of [their] own sex."

In this spirit, AFSA-164 also sought out an African American polygraph operator. AFSA was hiring a number of African Americans, including many women to be keypunch operators.

Raymond Weir had been an artillery officer during World War II. After the war, he attended Miner Teachers College in the District of Columbia;** he said at the time the school was considered "the workhouse on the hill." It was located across the street from Howard University and took students who could not afford the more prestigious institution. Weir was teaching high school when he was recruited by

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Major Fred Frazer, an officer in AFSA's security organization, who knew him from the war.

When Weir came to AFSA, he was the only African American in the security organization. The Agency sent him for training at the Keeler Polygraph Institute in Chicago, and, upon his return, he was tasked with interviewing prospective keypunch operators. As they awaited clearances, prospective hires were assigned to the AFSA school, then located at a former post office building on U Street in D.C.; it was nicknamed the "U Street U." Several rooms that had been part of a dispensary were refitted to serve as polygraph interview spaces located where the new folks were.

Weir recalled years later that he was usually quite busy with interviews, but that he also on occasion faced long stretches when no African American hiring occurred, and he had little to do but process charts from other examiners. At the time, it apparently was not considered that he would polygraph Caucasian applicants.

Eventually, though, the polygraph program was again swamped with applicants to process, and Weir's boss asked if he thought he could handle interviews with Caucasian people. When Weir answered in the affirmative, he was asked why he thought so. Weir explained he had interviewed many during his training in the Chicago school, mostly "crooks" as it happened. So, Weir was allowed to examine Caucasian men from the North and then, later, from the South. After more time, he was allowed to interview Caucasian women, too—although at first he was accompanied when the subject was young and unmarried.

Over the course of his career, Weir rose to become chief of examinations in the Office of Security, at Grade 15.

* In his 1998 interview, Weir said he had been hired in 1950, but he also admitted his memory was poor. Checking documents, AFSA had no need for polygraph operators in 1950, since it did not begin polygraph interviews until May 1951. An AFSA-164 report of August 1951 lists then current examiners and his name was not among them. It seems most likely he was hired in late 1951.

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** Miner Teachers College was founded in 1851. For a time it was associated with Howard University but was absorbed into the University of the District of Columbia in 1977.

SOURCE: Raymond Weir's 1998 oral history and some supporting documents from the AFSA period.

508 caption: Raymond Weir facing the camera frontally.

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